

As a member of the County appointed Citizens Committee on the Jail Tax, I dissented from the recommendations of the committee because I view the proposed sales tax increase as a temporary fix to a systemic problem.

The plan to raise the sales tax will NOT solve the unmanaged growth of our jail population, which has been fueled by a revolving door justice system and a failure to focus on early determination of which accused felons must be held before trial and which can be prudently released.

The sales tax which funds the jail is projected to increase only 2.5% per year, while our jail population has been increasing at a rate of 7.85% per year. If the rapid growth of the jail population is not reduced, the County's own projections show the jail district returning to a deficit within a decade.

The plan to spend 95% of the additional tax money to house more prisoners does not reflect the recommendations of the August 2004 U.S. Department of Justice report on Coconino County. The report focused on increasing coordination between law enforcement agencies, judges, prosecutors, public defenders and pretrial services that control the jail population. This process has begun but has not yet brought results.

Only a systemic improvement of the current system will provide any long-lasting changes. The tax does not fund the changes that will be necessary to implement systemic reform. A rigorous analysis and overhaul of the justice system will have a better chance of creating long-term improvement than a "band-aid" that doesn't address the growth of the jail population and that provides only 5% of its funding for solutions other than incarceration.

For further discussion and the 2004 Justice Department Report see WWW.Nojailtaxincrease.com. Vote 'No' and support a long-term solution, not a short-term fix.

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